**The Faith Race**

Hebrews 12:1-3 – Dec. 30, 2018

**Intro**

1. Here we are at the Sunday between Christmas and New Years
   1. A chance to look back on the year that has been and look forward to the new year to come
2. Pastor Rick has been masterfully unpacking the first chapter of John over the past few weeks
   1. Reminding us of who Jesus is
      1. The Word/LOGOS
      2. Lord of Creation
      3. Saviour
   2. And that what He says/does/puts in place, overrules any human ideas we might come up with
      1. Humanism cannot save us
   3. Jesus came to earth to save us
      1. Assuming that many if not most here have received Jesus as Saviour
      2. But that is just the beginning
         1. Salvation is just the beginning of our new life in Christ
         2. Now we are called, as new creatures, to walk through this life in a new way
            1. A way that brings honour and glory to God

**Me**

1. But have you ever noticed how hard life can be?
   1. I’ve been a Christian most of my life
      1. And while I can look back over my life and see God’s hand in it and the many, many ways He has blessed me
         1. I can’t say its been easy
         2. Life’s challenges, sickness, death, relationship struggles – none of this went away just because I’m a Christian
   2. Not just the struggles – but how I handle them, right?
      1. As a follower of Christ shouldn’t I be able to face all of life’s challenges in a Godly way?
      2. And yet I’m still human
         1. I remember not long ago after an argument with one of my daughters (explain)
            1. Off by myself and just cried out to God

*Why is it so hard?*

I didn’t mean just why was life so hard, but why was it so hard for me to respond to life the way God wanted me to

Why can’t the Christian life be easier?

**We**

1. Have you ever felt that way?
   1. Why is this life with Christ so hard?
      1. Relationships are hard
      2. Cancer is hard
      3. Death is hard
      4. Unsaved loved ones are hard
         1. Responding to all of life’s struggles in a godly way is particularly hard.
2. Have you ever felt, maybe just for a moment, like giving up?
   1. Like it isn’t worth it
   2. Like it would just be easier to live like the world
      1. Maybe just for a day
      2. I have, and maybe you have (if you’re honest with yourself)
3. So what does God’s Word have to say about this?
   1. Let’s look at a short passage in Hebrews
      1. 12:1-3
      2. Hebrews written to believers
         1. Jews who had converted to Christianity
      3. But they were under persecution and tempted to turn back to Judaism as Christianity became to hard
      4. Author wrote to remind them of their faith and encourage them to stand firm in their faith

**God**

Hebrews 12:1-3 (NIV)

***1****Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,****2****fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.****3****Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Pray

1. First off – you need to know that the first 2 verses are actually one long run-on sentence. Your translation has probably broken it into two or three sentences, but this is close to how it originally read:
   1. *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
   2. There is a lot in there, and I can understand why many English translations break it up.
      1. Two verses are all tied together – part of one large thought
      2. We are actually going to break it up even more as we work through it to make sure we understand what this passage means

***1****Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,*

1. Passage starts with *therefore*
   1. Always need to ask why?
   2. Means since/because/consequently, referring back to chapter 11 of Hebrews
      1. Heroes of the Faith
         1. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses’ parents, Moses, the people of God (Israelites), Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets
         2. All these were *commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised*
2. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses*
   1. The author of Hebrews uses the word *we/us/our* throughout this passage
      1. Community of believers
   2. Paints picture of cloud (a large group) surrounding them
      1. Like spectators in a stadium, but different
      2. They are watching not just as spectators, but as inspiring examples/witnesses of faith and endurance
      3. The Hebrews were to look to them for encouragement
3. *let us throw off everything that hinders*
   1. lighten the load
   2. picture of an athlete removing unnecessary clothing and training to remove unnecessary weight
4. *and the sin that so easily entangles*
   1. they were to remove *everything* that would hinder their progress, but especially and specifically any sin
      1. because sin would trip them up/hinder the progress of their faith
   2. that word *entangles* refers to something that clings so closely that it impedes movement
5. *And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us*
   1. Been setting us up for this race imagery all along
      1. Their lives were a race with a finish line/a goal
      2. Not a race to win but to finish
   2. Perseverance
      1. Not a sprint – a marathon
      2. Required sustained effort
      3. Not to give up or quit
         1. Ever notice in a race when someone drops out?
            1. Rarely because they can go no further
            2. But because they convince themselves they won’t be able to finish
   3. The race marked out for us
      1. The Hebrews didn’t get to determine the course
         1. Determined for them
      2. But they could see it in front of them
         1. They knew where to go

***2****fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

1. ***2****fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*
   1. The course isn’t all they saw
      1. They saw Jesus, who sets the pace, leads the way, by example
      2. He has run the race before
         1. He knows how it should be run
            1. Illustration of rabbit/pacesetter
   2. Jesus is the
      1. pioneer/author/creator/instigator/champion/  
         leader/initiator
         1. Of faith
      2. And the perfecter/finisher/completer
         1. Of faith
   3. Jesus is both the source of faith and the builder of continued faith to its completion
      1. He instigates faith
      2. He modeled the perfect life of faith
      3. He accomplished finally (on the cross) what is needed for them to have faith
      4. He brings faith to its intended conclusion/goal
   4. Now some of your translations might say *our faith*
      1. Original does not have the word for *our*
      2. Does that mean Jesus created and completes all faith or ‘faiths’?
         1. No – the word here is specific to the saving faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord that the Hebrews had.
            1. That’s why many translations say *our faith*
2. *For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
   1. More about Jesus – why did He do what He did?
      1. *For the joy set before him*
         1. He was looking forward to the joy to come
            1. Both the joy He had in providing salvation
            2. And the joy of sitting at the right hand of God
      2. What did He do?
         1. Endured/persevered the suffering of the cross
            1. His endurance is a model for their perseverance as they fix their eyes on Him
         2. Scorned the shame of the cross
            1. Saw it as having little value
      3. In the end, Jesus sat down in a position of power and authority at the right hand of God
         1. Jesus saw the suffering and shame of the crucifixion as nothing compared to the joy He was to experience

***3****Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

1. ***3****Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*
   1. Think about Jesus
      1. And the opposition He endured from sinners
   2. So they would not give up
      1. The Hebrews were facing all kinds of persecution
         1. Tempting them to quit the faith
   3. Their trials were nothing compared to what Christ endured
      1. So they were to look beyond their trials and persecution to the promised rewards of God
      2. Their endurance in the race was to be fueled by Christ’s example
         1. They were not to grow weary and lose heart

**You**

1. So what about you?
   1. How can you apply the principles of this passage to your life?
   2. To your “Faith Race”?
2. As you walk through this life, trying to live the life God has called you to as a Christian, how do you not give up?
3. It’s not supposed to be easy
   1. It wasn’t easy for Jesus
   2. Why would it be easy for you?
      1. That’s why it’s called a race
         1. Ever seen a race?
            1. They are hard
            2. People are sweating/breathing heavy/exhausted at the end
            3. Sore for days after
            4. Not to mention all the training that goes into the preparation
4. As you run the race of faith – is your focus on the obstacles in front of you, or is it on Jesus?
   1. You have a choice as Christians
      1. You can look at the course ahead of you and focus on all the challenges and unknowns and potential problems
      2. Or you can fix your eyes on Jesus
         1. He’s already run the race in its entirety as a man on this earth
            1. He knows how it should be run
            2. He knows the joy that awaits us at the completion of the race, of life
            3. He knows your trials are nothing compared to God’s promised rewards
            4. Your trials are nothing compared to what Jesus endured

Your endurance should be fueled by Christ’s example

* + - 1. You need faith to run the race
         1. Jesus invented faith
         2. Jesus perfects your faith
         3. Jesus is the source and perfecter of all the faith you need to run the race
    1. So why would you look to anyone else?
       1. Especially yourself?
          1. You can’t increase your faith

Only Jesus can

1. Running the Faith Race requires and intense focus on Jesus
   1. You want to improve your ‘race’, the way you live your life?
      1. Get closer to Jesus
      2. Spend more time with Him
      3. Listen to Him
      4. Study Him and copy Him
      5. Run like Him
      6. Fix your eyes on Jesus

Pray

Closing Song

**We**

1. Running the Faith Race requires and intense focus on Jesus
   1. Can you imagine what life would be like if we could all truly keep our eyes fixed on Jesus – at all times?
   2. That’s what it takes to make it through this hard life we live – Jesus
2. Maybe you’re here today and you don’t know Jesus yet
   1. You haven’t even started the race
   2. Because you are on your own race with the world
   3. You haven’t received Jesus as your Saviour and begun the race of the Christian life
      1. Don’t leave here today without talking to someone about that
      2. Yes, the Christian life is hard – but I can’t imagine life without Christ
      3. And the reward at the end of the race is worth every single trial along the way
         1. Receive Jesus today, won’t you?
3. And for those already on the course – in the middle of the race
   1. Let’s fix our eyes on Jesus so we never grow weary and lose heart

Have a great day everyone and Happy New Year!